



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Date: November 23, 2016
To: Members of the Historical Commission
From: Sarah Burks, Preservation Planner
Re: D-1414: 7 R. C. Kelley Street

An application to demolish the house at 7 R. C. Kelley Street and construct a new building was received on November 9, 2016. The applicant was notified of an initial determination of significance, and a public hearing was scheduled for December 1, 2016.



Site

The 1½-story house is located on the east side of Kelley Street, a one-block long street between Huron Avenue and Donnell Street. It is a clapboarded worker's cottage that sits on a brick foundation. A curb cut and driveway are located on the south side of the house. The grade drops considerably from the front of the lot to the back.

The structure is sited on a 5,992 square-foot lot (Map 229/Parcel 161). The zoning is Residence B, a two-family and townhouse zone that allows an FAR of .50 and a minimum of 2,500 square feet per dwelling unit. The height limit in this zone is 35 feet. Neighboring properties include 15 Kelley Street, a similar 2-story workers cottage that has a 3-story contemporary home attached at the rear. This new residence was designed by owner/architect Kyu Sung Woo and constructed in 1989. The same owner purchased 7 Kelley Street in 2004. A detached dwelling (incorrectly included on the assessor's plan on p. 1) was designed in 2013 but not constructed. The current proposal is to demolish the existing house and replace it with a modern design by Kyu Sung Woo.

Architectural Description

The 3-bay workers cottage at 7 Kelley St. was constructed in 1871. This house shares features characteristic of many workers cottages built in the brickyard subdivisions of north and west Cambridge including a raised brick basement, limited fenestration on the north (rear) wall, chimneys on the north wall, and a gable roof oriented with its end facing the street. The house has clapboarded walls, narrow corner boards, a modern dormer on the south face of the gable roof, and the center entrance is located on the south wall facing the side yard.



South and east sides of 7 Kelley Street.



East side of Kelley Street, looking north. #21 on right and #15 at center and #7 in distance.

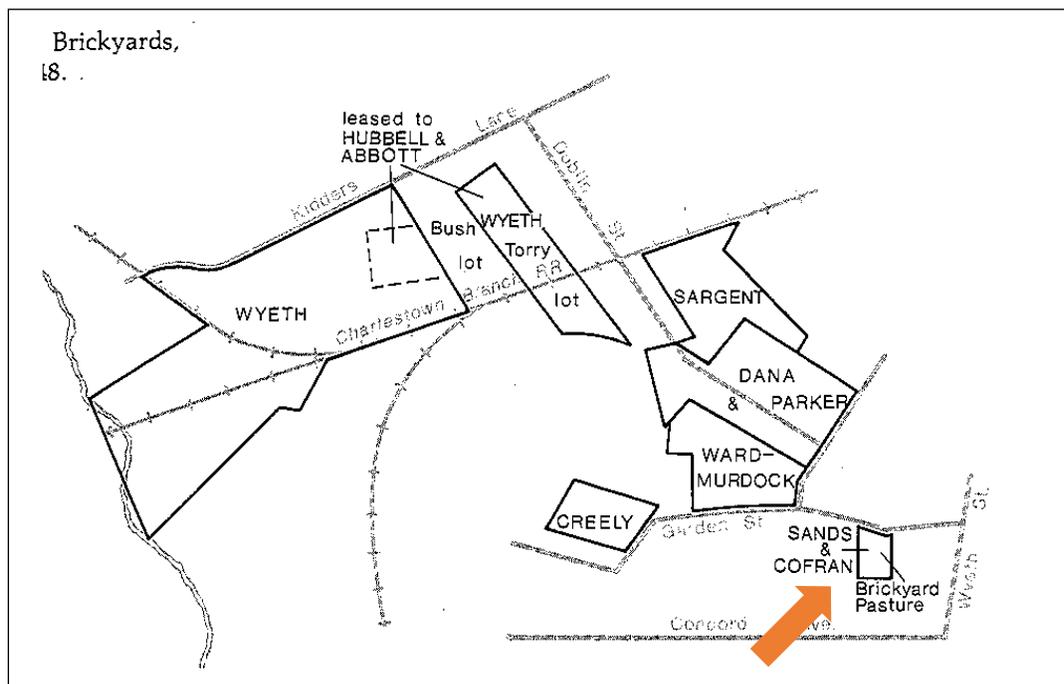
Current Condition

The current condition of the house's exterior appears good. The roof was replaced in 2004. Also that year, the exterior was painted and the porch was repaired. I have not examined the building's interior, though the assessor's database rates the interior condition as poor. It is currently occupied.

History

The 1842 extension of the Charlestown Branch Railroad from Miller's River to Fresh and Spy Ponds opened up Northwest Cambridge for the brick industry and for suburban development. Several subdivisions were platted by the owners of the brickyards for the mostly-Irish worker population. Many of the brickyard workers built cottages similar to the one at 7 Kelley Street.

Samuel Cofran and John Sands moved their brickmaking operations from the Charles River to the 18th-century Brickyard Pasture on Garden Street in 1845. Orrin and Tierney streets now occupy the site of the Cofran and Sands clay pit. Samuel Cofran sold his interest in the business to his partner, John Sands, in 1852 but held on to several of the lots in the vicinity including what is now 7 Kelley Street. Sands bought the Ward family's brickyard on the other side of Garden Street (now St. Peter's Field) in 1863 and closed the Brickyard Pasture operation in 1866.



Cambridge Brickyards in 1848 (Illustration 34, Cambridge Historical Commission, *Survey of Architectural History in Cambridge: Northwest Cambridge*).

Asa Murdock, a Cambridgeport trader, subdivided the land surrounding the Sands and Cofran brickyard. "Murdock's subdivisions were the first to incorporate house lots for brickyard laborers, creating a miniature village in which workers homes were set behind those of the brickyard owners." (*Northwest Cambridge*, 51). Murdock purchased the Warland lot, which included the Brickyard Pasture, and part of the Hill estate, along Concord Avenue, and divided the Concord Avenue parcel into five large lots. Behind it, Murdock divided the land into smaller lots around the Sands and Cofran brickyard and laid out the lots along Donnell and Tuttle (now R.C. Kelley) streets in 1851 and 1852. Irish laborers purchased Murdock's lots beginning in the mid 1850s and built up a small village of workers cottages.

Samuel Cofran had a shop building on this lot, which abutted the corner of the Brickyard Pasture's clay pit. Unlike the other lots nearby that Asa Murdock developed in the 1850s, Cofran retained this lot until after the clay pit in the Brickyard Pasture was closed. Cofran constructed a house here in 1871 and sold the property to John Murphy for \$1500. John Murphy's occupation was listed as a laborer in the 1872 city directory and as brickmaker in 1878. Originally from Ireland, Murphy worked in later years as a school janitor on Concord Avenue and died in 1892 at the age of 84. His son, Joseph Murphy, married Elizabeth McQuaid of Somerville in 1895 and they resided in the family home on Kelley Street for several more years.

In the first decade of the twentieth century the property passed to another Irish immigrant, the widow Winifred A. Gaughan. She died in 1917 and the property was then acquired by Michael Ford(e). Ford worked in the shoe industry, making lasts and later as an employee of the Whittemore Shoe Polish Company. His widow, Helen, owned the home until 1970.

The name of the street was changed from Tuttle after World War II to honor Robert C. Kelley, a naval reservist killed in action. Robert C. Kelley's family lived on nearby Sherman Street.



View from east of 1 (right) and 7 (left) Kelley Street with shed, ca. 1970. Photo by Richard Cheek. The house at 1 Kelley was demolished without a permit in 1990, a violation of the city's demolition delay ordinance, which led to a two year moratorium of the site. The house was eventually replaced with two attached single family townhomes (10 and 14 Donnell Street) of contemporary design.

Significance and Recommendation

7 Kelley Street exhibits characteristic architectural features common to the vernacular workers cottages built by and for the mostly-Irish laborers in North and West Cambridge. It is the staff recommendation that the Commission find the house significant as a characteristic example of a mid-nineteenth century Cambridge worker's cottage and for its broad social associations with the Irish immigrant population in this neighborhood. The house has direct association with Samuel M. Cofran, one of the partners in the Cofran & Sands brickmaking company and general associations with the Cambridge brickmaking industry, so important to the economic growth of this part of Cambridge.

The scale of the proposed new house is considerably larger than the existing house. Its modern massing and architectural style is very different from the existing, but the street has evolved into an eclectic mix of historic houses, some with modern additions and alterations, and several examples of new construction. The Commission should hear testimony from the neighbors and review the plans for replacement construction before making a further determination.

cc: Ranjit Singanayagam, ISD
Kyu Sung Woo, owner and architect